

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A
SUBJECT: PRESS BACKGROUNDER BY SENATOR JOSEPH BIDEN

1. ON AUGUST 12 SIX HUNGARIAN JOURNALISTS WHO SPECIALIZE IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS WERE INVITED BY P&C TO MEET WITH SENATOR BIDEN AT THE AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE TO DISCUSS CURRENT ISSUES. THE SESSION WAS ON BACKGROUND. THE FOLLOWING JOURNALISTS ATTENDED: JANOS AVAR, MAGYAR NEMZET; PETER VAJDA, NEPSZABADSAG; VICTOR PALFY, MAGYAR HIRLAP; TIBOR KOVES, MTI; JANOS HORVATH, HUNGARIAN TV; GYULA SCHEL, HUNGARIAN RADIO.

2. THE MAIN TOPIC THAT WAS RAISED BY THE JOURNALISTS CENTERED ON PRESIDENT'S CARTER'S HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY AND, ACCORDING TO THE HUNGARIANS, THE DAMAGE THAT POLICY HAS DONE TO DETENTE. ANOTHER MAJOR THREAT TO DETENTE, ACCORDING TO THE JOURNALISTS, WERE SECRETARY OF STATE VANCE'S SALT PROPOSALS WHICH WERE REJECTED BY MOSCOW. BECAUSE OF THESE TWO DEVELOPMENTS, THE HUNGARIANS POINTED OUT, HUNGARY AS WELL AS ALL OTHER NON-SUPER POWERS, PARTICULARLY IN EUROPE, FEEL THE THREAT OF A BREAKDOWN OF THE DETENTE PROCESS. IT BECAME CLEAR

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THAT HUNGARIANS FEAR POLITICAL RETRENCHMENT MIGHT RESULT BECAUSE OF THE CONSISTENT PRESSURE OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY ON EASTERN EUROPEAN STATES. SUCH A RETRENCHMENT WOULD REQUIRE AN UNCOMFORTABLE RETURN TO THE PREVIOUS HARD LINE POLICY ON THE PART OF THE USSR AND, THEREFORE, HUNGARY. SENATOR BIDEN, AS WELL AS AMBASSADOR KAISER WHO WAS PRESENT, REITERATED THAT

NO MATTER HOW IT MIGHT LOOK FROM THE HUNGARIAN SIDE, THE U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY WAS NOT AIMED AT EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AND THEY BOTH SAID THAT THE POLICY WAS NOT LIKELY TO DISAPPEAR. AS REGARDS SALT, SENATOR BIDEN REMARKED THAT THE U.S. WANTS A SALT AGREEMENT AS MUCH AS THE SOVIETS AND WOULD NOT KNOWINGLY THWART SUCH AN AGREEMENT. AS REGARDS THE SECRETARY'S PROPOSALS IN MOSCOW, SENATOR BIDEN SUGGESTED THAT THEY WERE DESIGNED TO GO A BIT FASTER THAN THE SOVIETS WERE ACCUSTOMED, BUT THAT THEY WERE NOT DESIGNED TO GIVE THE U.S. A MILITARY ADVANTAGE.

3. THERE WAS RELATIVELY LITTLE COMMENT ON MFN BEYOND SENATOR BIDEN'S STATEMENT OF SUPPORT.

4. THE CROWN WAS ONLY RAISED PERIPHERALLY WITH NO SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSION.

5. COMMENT: THIS WAS AS MUCH A USEFUL BRIEFING FOR SENATOR BIDEN AS IT WAS FOR THE JOURNALISTS. IT WAS REPEATEDLY INFERRED, AS WELL AS EXPLICITLY STATED, TO BIDEN THAT HUNGARIANS LIVE IN FEAR OF A BREAKDOWN OF THE DETENTE PROCESS WHICH WOULD MEAN A RETURN TO THE HARSH TIMES OF AN EARLIER PERIOD. AS ONE OF THE JOURNALISTS SAID, "WE CAN LIVE WITHOUT THE CROWN, BUT WE CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT DETENTE."
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